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# The Finnish Think Tank Landscape – A Mixture of Consensualism and Adversity?

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As a common feature of Nordic countries, the Finnish landscape of thinks tanks has been populated by large corporatist interest organisations and government-funded research organisations. In addition to this, since 2005, party-affiliated think tanks form a notable part of the picture. Recently, several small think tanks that are oriented towards specific themes, such as international relations, the environment and feminism, have been founded. This article examines Finnish developments in the field of think tanks with two objectives. First, it gives a general overview of the Finnish think tank landscape. Second, by using interview data and public mission statements of the most prominent think tanks, it explores how these organisations see their role in Finnish society. What is their relationship with media and the political machinery, and how does this relate to their position and activities as either consensual or adversarial actors? It is concluded that redeeming the place of think tanks in the Finnish polity is a continuing challenge, and resorting to adversarial tactics is not a favourable way to do so. This approach has mostly been attempted by neoliberal think tanks that, in the past, have also profited from corporatist structures to enhance their objectives.

## Introduction

A challenge in trying to understand the role of think tanks in society starts with defining what a think tank is. The institution has its roots in the United States, from where it has travelled across the globe into many countries in Europe, including the five Nordic countries, arriving earlier to Sweden and Denmark and taking root in Finland only recently and in a more modest way (see also Lounasmeri 2016). Each country has its unique landscape in this respect, tying in with the political life and culture. Even the Nordic countries, often seen as sharing a similar political system and structures, vary in this regard. In any one country, factors like historical circumstances, political culture, legal traditions and the character of the regime in power have

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an effect on the think tank landscape (Stone 2007, 261). On a very general level, Hart and Vromen (2008, 135) offer a sound definition of think tanks, seeing them as institutes producing research-based policy arguments, offering them in the policymaking process. Kelstrup (2016, 10) has a similar definition but adds the idea of think tanks claiming autonomy. As for the Finnish landscape of think tanks, this does not hold entirely, as party-affiliated organisations make up a good part of the picture.

A general division is usually made between independent, research-oriented organisations and advocacy think tanks seen as having an explicit ideological profile (Weaver 1989). These can include different political leanings and funding derived from substantial private or public donors/funders: neoliberal, free market-oriented think tanks, as well as social democratic or otherwise politically oriented think tanks. In the Finnish case, very little remains between these two categories. Worth mentioning is Demos Helsinki, a mixture of a consultancy and research organisation with a versatile funding base.

The more precise angle to look at think tank activities here is to examine their relation with consensual and adversarial mentality and activity – whether think tanks see their mission as challenging existing structures or building on the existing consensus. In the historically corporatist Nordic countries, this is a particularly interesting question. Think tanks may support or oppose consensus, but how and what they are most likely to do is disputed (Campbell & Pedersen 2014; Kinderman 2017). The data presented here are qualitative in nature, and the question is approached by analysing what think tanks say they do in interviews and in their public communication (websites). The more specific point was to determine how they position themselves in relation to public debate and the media, as well as to the political machinery and policymaking. The article is divided into two parts. First, the landscape of think tanks in Finland is analysed in terms of the types of existing organisations and their background. Second, relying on interviews[1] with the seven most prominent think tanks in Finland and on material collected from their websites,[2] the article explores the think tanks' relationship towards the public sphere and politics, as well as how these organisations appear in relation to consensus and adversity.

## The Landscape of Finnish Think Tanks

The Finnish think tank scene has been mapped by collecting information from an international think tank index (https://www.gotothinktank.com/) and Finnish public sources on think tanks.[3] As a common feature of Nordic countries, their landscape of think tanks has been populated by large corporatist interest organisations and government-funded research organisations. In addition, there are several recently found small think tanks that are

oriented towards specific themes, such as international relations, the environment and feminism.

In contrast to other Nordic countries, in Finland, party-affiliated think tanks form a notable part of the picture, as government funding for them was initiated in 2005 (see also Lounasmeri 2016). The idea was to renew and invigorate representative democracy and the way parties prepare their policy programmes. Think tanks could bring in new insights and ideas from the fields of research, product development and organisational knowledge (Turunen 2005). This was tied to the more general, global development of the weakening ties between parties and the voting citizens. The Finnish think tanks associated with political parties include the leftist tanks Kalevi Sorsa Foundation, associated with the Social Democratic Party; the Left Forum, associated with the Left Alliance; Suomen Toivo (Finland's Hope), associated with the right-wing National Coalition Party; e2, originally associated with the Centre Party but now claiming independence; Visio, associated with the Green Party; Suomen Perusta (Foundation of Finland), associated with the Finns Party and Agenda, which is close to the Swedish People's Party RKP; and Kompassi, the Christian Democratic Party's think tank. Agenda along with Magma, which is funded by numerous Finnish-Swedish foundations, both represent the Swedish-speaking minority's point of view and are liberal in their orientation.

State funding is distributed to think tanks by the Ministry of Education and Culture according to election results. The funding, in total, is about €600,000 per year, and in 2018, it was divided as follows: e2 Tutkimus: €148,000, Suomen Toivo: €145,000, Suomen Perusta: €103,000, Kalevi Sorsa-säätiö: €98,000, Visio: €34,000, Vasemmistofoorumi: €33,000, Agenda: €25,000 and Kompassi: €14,000. In comparison, the direct funding of political parties provided by the state in 2018 was €29.6 million. Some of the organisations depend quite heavily on state support. For example, in 2015, Suomen Toivo received 79 percent of its budget from the state; Visio, 77 percent; and Suomen Perusta, 67 percent. A report discussing state funding indicates that some of the think tanks would cease to function without this money; they were actually founded to receive their share of this funding (Raivio et al. 2018). There is a variation amongst these organisations, as well; Centre Party think tank e2 changed its name to e2 Tutkimus (e2 Research) and started to profile itself more as a research institution, taking distance from the party affiliation and also finding other avenues of funding.[4]

Naturally, research organisations have been funded by different interest groups in Finnish society, such as trade unions or employers' organisations, but these have not taken a particularly active public role. As in the case of Sweden (see the article on Swedish think tanks in this issue), the earliest appearance of think tanks in Finland was in the form of research institutes. Furthermore, in Norway, there is a large representation of independent

research institutes (see the article on Norwegian think tanks in this issue). In Finland, these organisations include Pellervo Economic Research (Pellervon taloustutkimus, PTT), associated with the Central Union of Agricultural Producers and Forest Owners (Maa- ja metsätaloustuottajain Keskusliitto) and the Centre Party; the Labour Institute for Economic Research (Palkansaajien tutkimuslaitos, PT), associated with the Central Organization of Finnish Trade Unions (Suomen Ammattiliittojen Keskusjärjestö) and the Social Democratic Party; the Research Institute of the Finnish Economy (Elinkeinoelämän tutkimuslaitos, ETLA), funded mainly by Finnish employer organisations; and the governmental organisation Valtion taloudellinen tutkimuskeskus VATT, Institute for Economic Research. Each organisation prepares evaluations and forecasts concerning the national economy. In addition, numerous sectoral research institutes exist, some of which are affiliated with universities. Others worth mentioning include the Finnish Institute of International Affairs FIIA (Ulkopoliittinen instituutti, UPI), funded by the Finnish Parliament; the non-government organisation Crisis Management Initiative, founded by Martti Ahtisaari; and Sitra, the Finnish Innovation Fund, a public foundation. All these organisations are research oriented and aim at developing and having a societal impact in Finland or internationally. In some international rankings, ETLA and UPI have been ranked as some of the most influential Finnish think tanks.

Apart from research organisations, the oldest organisation labelled nowadays as a think tank in Finland is Elinkeinoelämän valtuuskunta (EVA), a liberal pro-market advocacy think tank founded in 1974 with funding from employers' organisations, such as Elinkeinoelämän keskusliitto (EK) and Teollisuuden Keskusliitto, as well as private corporations and businesses. EVA shares a board and funding with ETLA, and the organisations work in close cooperation. Another front-runner is Demos Helsinki, a non-aligned think tank with its original sister organisation based in the UK, claiming to have brought the think tank phenomenon to Finland. Demos Helsinki describes itself as a future-oriented think tank working for a democratic and sustainable society. It has a large funding base and conducts much project work that is publicly funded.

Liberal or leftist think tanks are outspoken about their leanings. EVA describes its aim as 'to identify and evaluate trends that are important for Finnish companies and for the long-term success of the society as a whole' (http://www.eva.fi/en/eva/). Finland's Hope declares that it is a political think tank based on party activity and that it reflects a National Coalition worldview in its major themes (https://toivoajatuspaja.fi/mika-toivo/). As for the think tanks associated with leftist political parties, the Kalevi Sorsa Foundation profiles itself as 'describing and contributing to the conversation on what kind of social democratic policies combine freedom and justice

with equality, also in the long term' (http://sorsafoundation.fi/en/). The Left Forum says it is 'building a collaborative network sharing a leftist set of values and extending from political parties to universities, research institutions and expert organizations' (http://www.vasemmistofoorumi.fi/en/leftforum/). As a summary, all the advocacy and non-aligned think tanks are presented in Table 1.

A quantitative Nordic media analysis in 2016 showed that compared with the press coverage of think tanks in other Nordic countries, especially Denmark, that in Finland was small, with samples from 2006 and 2013 (Lounasmeri 2016). This was partly due to the recent founding of think tanks in Finland, but the situation has not radically changed, as can be seen from the Table 2. EVA, which had most of the public attention (89 percent) in the studied material in 2006 and 2013, has had to share its portion with other players in the field, on the basis of the figures from recent years in the largest Finnish daily, *Helsingin Sanomat*. At the same time, the overall coverage continues to be modest.

## History of Consensual Policymaking in Finland: Mixing Corporatism with Neoliberal Ideas

The ideas that think tanks present and the ways how they operate can be examined in relation to upholding consensus and cooperation or questioning and maybe even challenging the status quo in different ways. This can include using adversarial communication in public or questioning the functioning of existing corporatist structures. Theoretically, consensus can be seen as tied to institutional structures and decision-making processes, which is related to the corporatist model that is traditionally prevalent in Nordic countries. Another way of looking at consensus is seeing it more as a cultural and communicative phenomenon, in which a will to find a common ground and eliminate or downgrade political differences is emphasised (Lounasmeri 2010, 25–26).

The landscape of think tanks can be seen against the backdrop of recent societal developments that have affected all Nordic countries. These include the much-discussed decline of corporatism and the rise of lobbyism and the so-called consultant democracy (see, e.g., Kuusela & Ylönen 2013 for the Finnish case), as well as the phenomenon of mediatisation, implying the growing role of the media logic in political processes. There is evidence implying that the phenomenon of de-corporatisation might not hold for all the five Nordic countries, the notable exceptions being Finland (Vesa et al. 2018) and Iceland (Óskarsdóttir 2018). Other factors also influence the way think tanks have been able to establish themselves as actors in policy processes. In the introduction to this theme issue, Kelstrup mentions the

Table 1. The Finnish Think Tank Landscape (Excluding Publicly Funded Research Organisations)

| Name | Established | Political party or other affiliations | Funding | Outspoken goals/values |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| EVA (Finnish Business and Policy Forum) | 1974 | ETLA, EK | Private (EK) | Pro-market |
| Kalevi Sorsa Foundation | 2005 | SDP | ca 2/3 from Palkansaajasäätiö, also Tradeka, SAK, Työväen opintorahasto | Social democratic |
| Left Forum | 2006 | Left Alliance People's Educational Association (KSL) and Yrjö Sirola Foundation | Ministry of Education and Culture | Freedom, justice, economic system that produces welfare and ecological sustainability |
| Finland's Hope/Suomen Toivo/Ajatuspaja Toivo | Mid 2000's (Background in Kansallinen Kulttuurisäätiö sr. formed in 1935) | National Coalition Party | Mainly: Ministry of Education and Culture<br>• National Collation Party and their parliamentary group<br>• Wilfried Martens Centre of European Studies (EPP-Parties' think tank organisations' umbrella organisation) | World view of the National Coalition Party |
| e2 Tutkimus (formerly Ajatuspaja e2) | 2006 (e2 Tutkimus since 2018) | Center Party | Since 2016:<br>• The Central Union of Agricultural Producers and Forest Owners (MTK)<br>• Midway Foundation (Keskitien Tukisäätiö)<br>• EU<br>• UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) | Progressive, forward looking, open-minded, European and ecological |
| Visio | 2005 | Green Party<br>Administratively under The Green Cultural Association (Vihreä Sivistysliitto) | • Ministry of Education and Culture<br>• The Green Cultural Association<br>Green European Foundation (GEF) (functions as an umbrella organisation for Green think tanks in Europe) | Environment, society, democracy and Europe |

(Continues)

Table 1. (Continued)

| Name | Established | Political party or other affiliations | Funding | Outspoken goals/values |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Foundation of Finland/ Suomen perusta | 2012 | Finns party | Finns Party<br>Ministry of Culture and Education | Far right/conservative. Immigration; migration's impact on the national economy |
| Demos Helsinki | 2005 | Independent | State and private funding | |
| Libera | 2011 | Independent | Private and corporate funding/not public | Neoliberal. Individual freedom and free market economy |
| Tänk | 2011 | Independent | Private donations and voluntary contributions | Independent, non-partisan. Supporting and improving the success and welfare of the Finnish society at large. Pragmatic, fact-based approach to solving societal challenges |
| Magma | 2008 | European Liberal Forum (ELF) | Swedish-Finnish foundations | Swedish-Finnish liberal values |
| Ekvalita | 2008 | Independent | • For projects:<br>• Ministry of Education and Culture<br>• Private Foundations For consultant work and coaching: private | Equality |
| Nordic West Office (part of Miltton Group) (CEO Risto E.J. Penttilä) | 2017 | Independent with corporate collaboration: Miltton Group E3 Oxford Analytica Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe | • No information available | To support and help companies from the Nordic countries to function in USA |

(Continues)

Table 1. (Continued)

| Name | Established | Political party or other affiliations | Funding | Outspoken goals/values |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Safer Globe | 2010 | Independent | • Horizon2020 IECEU-project<br>• Ministry of Foreign Affairs<br>• Ministry of Education and Culture<br>• Project funding | Independent; studying and developing tools for the promotion of lasting peace and security. |
| Tankki | 2018 | Suomen Luonnonsuojeluliitto (SLL); founded by youth (18–25-years), their mentors, SLL experts and cooperative parties | Sitra | Sustainable way of life |
| Agenda | 2016 | Svenska Bildningsförbund<br>RKP | No information available | Liberal; Nordic and European roots high lighting issues important to Swedish speaking people in Finland |
| Hattu | 2015 | Independent | Foundations. Koneen Säätiö (2015–2017), Kordelinin säätiö (2017–2018) | Intervention to change the fact that women as experts are invisible in the fields of science, media, politics, culture and leadership |
| Kompassi | 2018 | • The Christian Democratic Party<br>• Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies<br>• Sallux | No information available | Christian-democratic |
| East Office | 2008 | The Finnish Ministry for Foreign affairs and the Confederation of Finnish Industries | 25 equal shareholders including Atria, cargotec, Fazer, KONE, Finnair, Fennovoima, Fortum, Neste, Posti, SRV, Valio, etc. | Understanding Russia: analyses of the economic, social and political development; supporting its members in Russian markets |

availability of funding and the role of political culture. Both of these factors seem to be relevant in the Finnish case.

Taking a look at past developments since the 1970s, especially EVA's role in them, is necessary to understand how consensus and corporatism play a role in today's Finnish political environment. When EVA was established in 1974, it was a part of a wave of neoliberal think tanks established in Western countries (Wuokko 2019). Maiju Wuokko (2019), an economic historian, has analysed how EVA and the Finnish business community in the 1970s and 1980s actually used corporatist institutions and consensual policymaking traditions to advance neoliberal policies – these functioned as useful avenues to advance business interests, not necessarily as important values in themselves. An important moment in this respect was the Korpilampi Conference in 1977, in which in the spirit of consensus and in the name of national competitiveness, tax cuts on corporations and a suspension in wage increases were agreed upon (Saari 2010, 475). This was proceeded by the close cooperation between EVA and the more right-leaning Social Democrats. An important memo on competitiveness was produced for Korpilampi by an official of the Ministry of Finance, the Social Democrat Raimo Sailas, who also drafted the welfare cuts during the 1990s severe economic recession. Thus, the alliances and concepts that built the 1990s consensus were already established in the 1970s (Lounasmeri & Ylä-Anttila 2014, 67). At the heart of the Finnish consensus lay the idea of the importance of competitiveness, with the national interest demanding an adjustment to economic necessities (Kettunen 2006, 309). Furthermore, Wuokko (2019) sees that the neoliberal trend has since persisted: 'Finnish welfare, consensus, and labour market policies have since the 1990s been developed along the lines advocated by business already in the previous decades'. The idea of redefining the state as a coaching state, promoting competition and neoliberal reform, has been found by several Finnish scholars (e.g., Kantola & Kananen 2017). Thus, the commitment towards consensual policymaking might still be found, as long as it proves to be a practical tool for enhancing specific policies.

A look into how neoliberal policies have been adopted in different regions shows that in Northern European countries, they have been applied whilst preserving the welfare state ideology, progressive taxation and corporatist industrial relations at the same time (Ban 2016; 8, 14–15; also Greve 2007; Ryner 2007). Other evidence suggests that in the Swedish case, neo-liberal think tanks have challenged Swedish corporatism from the mid-1970s and in the 2000s (Kinderman 2017). In an effort to find a more nuanced view vis-à-vis corporatism, Vesa et al. (2018) have analysed the recent developments of the system in Finland, comparing them with those in Denmark and the UK. Vesa et al. make four important findings based on surveys of both interest group representatives and civil servants in Finland. First,

Table 2. Mentions of Think Tanks in *Helsingin Sanomat* (2014–2018)

| | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Party affiliated think tanks* | | | | | | |
| Kalevi Sorsa foundation | 12 | 19 | 5 | 9 | 4 | 49 |
| e2 Research | 4 | 2 | 9 | 13 | 14 | 42 |
| Foundation of Finland | 0 | 6 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 9 |
| Left Forum | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 6 |
| Agenda (2016) | – | – | 0 | 3 | 3 | 6 |
| Visio | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| Finland's Hope | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Kompassi (2018) | – | – | – | – | 2 | 2 |
| *Other think tanks* | | | | | | |
| EVA | 43 | 62 | 41 | 30 | 27 | 203 |
| Libera | 22 | 16 | 25 | 14 | 22 | 99 |
| Demos | 10 | 21 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 67 |
| Hattu (2015) | 5 | 4 | 1 | 4 | 0 | 14 |
| SaferGlobe | 1 | 0 | 4 | 2 | 5 | 12 |
| Magma | 0 | 1 | 0 | 4 | 2 | 7 |
| Nordic West Office (2017) | – | – | – | 3 | 3 | 6 |
| Ekvalita | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |

although the official committee institution has been largely dismantled (Rainio-Niemi 2010), working groups and other extra-parliamentary bodies are still important in advocating policy processes. Second, public administration comes out strong as a site of advocacy in comparison to the government and parliament. Third, of the interest groups studied, economic groups seem to have an especially strong position. Fourth is the finding related to the relevance of resources, which predicted the ability to influence more strongly in Finland than in Denmark or the UK. These findings differ in many respects from the other Nordic countries and may also explain the weaker role and influence of think tanks, in general. Corporatist tendencies, as well as administrative routines, continue to have a strong role (Braun 2013; Vesa et al. 2018).

As for the media's role in the Finnish polity, it has been attested to many times that the relevance of public debate and media attention is not always strong when influencing specific policy processes (Kunelius et al. 2009; Pfetsch et al. 2014, 95; Lounasmeri 2016). In the US context, Rich (2004, 139) has stated that the think tanks most widely cited in the media are not seen by policymakers themselves as particularly influential. Having said this, using adversarial tactics is a way to get public attention and create discussion, which might affect politics in the long term. At the same time, when strong reciprocal ties and a consensual atmosphere prevail, strong support and a strong resource base are often needed to be able to enter the spheres of influence.

## Think Tanks' Roles and Strategies

For this research, the representatives of the following seven most prominent Finnish think tanks (excluding traditional research organisations) at the time were interviewed: EVA, Demos Helsinki, Kalevi Sorsa Foundation, Left Forum, Libera, Finland's Hope and e2. The interviews conducted were semi-structured in nature, relying on certain key themes to be discussed, but also giving room to new material or perspectives to arise. The websites of the interviewed think tanks, in turn, were searched to find all the mentions about the missions, goals and tasks of the organisations in question. Both materials were analysed by using a qualitative content analysis approach (Mayring 2000), creating meaningful categorisations derived from the research question. The particular approach used here can also be called directed, as the analysis starts from a theoretical viewpoint using relevant research findings as guidance (Hsieh & Shannon 2005). The material was organised thematically in an effort to see how the representatives of the think tanks see their organisations' role in Finnish society and the kinds of operation modes they deem most appropriate. The main categorisations were (1) the role of publicity and the media, and communication with policymakers, (2) the role of research versus keeping up with the day-to-day agenda and (3) the organisations' perceived relationship with adversity and consensus.

Realising that relying on these organisations' own declarations of their mission needs a critical examination, the analysis is presented bearing this in mind; examples in which contradictory evidence has been found are also provided.

### *The Role of Different Channels in Think Tanks' Life – Publicity and the Political Machinery*

Think tanks affiliated with political parties use both channels – publicity and political machinery – but as they do not get much media publicity, they seem to invest their scarce resources more into doing affluence work that happens in the background. This includes giving advice and background materials to not only politicians and other decision-makers but also to journalists, in this way influencing the public discussion without being explicitly mentioned in the press.

> And well… what of course is not visible in public… is that to a certain extent, we give background information to the media. Meaning giving an expert's input to a journalist who is writing on a certain subject. (A party-affiliated think tank representative)

Party-affiliated think tanks describe themselves as working in the intersection of research and political decision-making, and to some extent public

discussion. The Left Forum announces that it is directly involved in developing the party programme.

EVA has been successful in actively using both channels, influencing policy-makers, but also public debate. The organisation has managed to build an established position in mainstream media over the course of a long period (see also Lounasmeri 2016). It has built close relations with decision-makers, upheld by personal networks and resources that allow organising exclusive events. It also tries to reach politicians more directly, as is evident with its guidebook for parliamentarians initiative (2019). EVA hoped to distribute it to everyone running in the elections in spring 2019, an ambitious plan reflecting its apparent self-confidence in being a credible authority within Finnish politics.

Influencing in the background raises a problem when trying to measure the influence of think tanks based on the amount of mentions of the media. Still, political party think tanks are active in producing knowledge in the form of research-based publications, pamphlets and blog texts. For example the Left Forum succeeded for an eight-year period to regularly give out the publication series Peruste, despite the modest visibility of the publication and the think tank itself, in mainstream media. However, the Left Forum decided to discontinue the publication in 2018 in order to allocate its scarce resources into doing research.

For some privately funded think tanks, media platforms (old and new) that are open for the public seem to play a crucial role. Libera, a pro-market think tank founded in 2011, focuses on the creative usage of social media to get its message through to both mainstream media and decision-makers. Libera's strategy is built on the presumption that times have changed, that decision-makers actively follow debate on social media and are influenced by their content, or alternatively are exposed to such content when mainstream media pick it up.

For Demos Helsinki, the media also plays an important role in communicating its ideas; Demos Helsinki has consciously built up a brand since its beginning. This brand-building project depends also on media coverage. However, for Demos Helsinki, the relation with the media and with decision-makers is more versatile. It has collaborations with ministries, cities, universities and private companies. According to the interview, its influence on society happens most importantly through the concepts it has succeeded to introduce and popularise. According to Demos Helsinki, it has succeeded in directing the distribution of funding by affluent governmental institutions to new directions. Although these claims are believable, this type of indirect impact of think tanks is quite difficult to measure or verify.

### *Role of Research versus Reacting to the Day-to-Day Agenda*

Think tanks affiliated with political parties stress in the interviews their role as providers of objective research for decision-makers. These think tanks,

publicly perceived as more or less mouthpieces to political parties, seem to strive to present themselves as independent actors producing knowledge.

> – there is often this kind of assumption that they [party-affiliated think tanks] are advocacy types of organizations. And that can become a hindrance; for the media, they do not want to go along and propagate a party's view. – Of course, some of these think tanks deny that they have anything to do with parties, but appearing as totally neutral is maybe more of a marketing ploy so that this kind of label would not hamper their activities. – for example, they might have other quarters than party representatives on their board, but these think tanks were originally founded to develop representational democracy and the party system. (A party-affiliated think tank representative)

A comparison of the strategies of Finnish privately funded think tanks with party-affiliated ones seemingly shows that the former are closer to the practices and modes of operation that drive the mediatised, fast-track, competitive and pluralist idea of a think tank captured by McGann (2019, 20–21):

> To remain relevant and impactful, think tanks and policy institutes must simultaneously pursue rigor, innovation, accessibility and accountability more than ever before. In short, think tanks must adapt and innovate by transforming their organization to be smarter, better, faster and more mobile … The traditional academic-centric model has ended.

What might be true in Anglo-Saxon countries or larger Western European countries can find a different landscape in a remote small country of the North with a tradition of conservative public discussion and a democratic corporatist decision model of decision-making. Furthermore, the political culture emphasising consensus and rational technical expertise play a part here. In the Finnish public debate, objectivity is a high value, especially when it comes to research, and reaching a credible position seems difficult when a think tank is identified strongly with a political party. The media almost seem to have no category for these actors. An interesting case in this respect is e2, nowadays e2 Research, formerly affiliated with the Centre Party. This think tank has publicly announced its secession from the Finnish think tank scene and has reformulated its organisational identity and brand as a research institution. It has also stressed its independence from party politics. In an interview two years before its official reformulation, its representative already stressed that 'the Centre party is just one of our 37 partners we cooperate with. The relationship is not close'. After taking distance to the Centre Party, it seems that e2 has increased its publicity in the largest Finnish newspaper, *Helsingin Sanomat*, in 2017–2018 (see Table 2). During this period, e2 was mentioned more than 25 times, which is more than the number of mentions of the other party-affiliated think tanks combined. Whether this visibility in *Helsingin Sanomat* is a result of the organisation's restructuring, its public distancing from the Centre Party, the quality of publications and research, its

media strategy or some other reason would need in-depth analysis. Still, this poses a question on whether being identified as a think tank is something beneficial from the point of view of getting publicity in mainstream media. This seems like a sound conclusion to make in light of the interviews; it was repeatedly stated that being affiliated with a political party or having an ideological background makes it more difficult to be heard by the media. Comments from different ends of the think tank spectrum attest to this:

> … I was recruited outside of politics, having a background as an academic researcher. The idea was… to have societal credibility, as a societal actor of its own right and not that the organization is an extension of the party office political department. (A party-affiliated think tank representative)

> … the name Elinkeinolämän valtuuskunta is a bit problematic from the point of view of trying to be identified as a think tank. It makes us seemingly a part of EK [*Elinkeinoelämän keskusliitto*, an employers' organization]. (EVA's representative)

The media rather acknowledges actors with a more objective position, which, for one, can point to the direction of research institutes.

Typically party-affiliated think tanks do not have a large staff, and in many cases they commission research reports from outside experts. They also produce a lot of analyses and pamphlets. Here there is some variation though. Kalevi Sorsa foundation and the Left Forum have each 2–3 researchers working for them, plus the leader who has a research background, as opposed to Toivo and Libera, who use a large pool of experts to raise issues on the agenda. EVA cooperates closely with the research institute Etla. e2 and Demos Helsinki profile themselves most as research or expert organisations: e2 has seven researchers with specialisation areas, and Demos Helsinki employs 45 experts or consultants. As e2 seems to emphasise the academic background of its staff, Demos Helsinki says its people represent the fields of social science, economy, engineering, philosophy and design, but does not give further details on their education. As for the focus of the think tanks' research and analyses, the left leaning are more global in their orientation, as the right leaning ones present a more national outlook and themes more to do with national party politics, economic and tax policies. e2 deals a great deal with identity questions, and Demos Helsinki takes an seemingly neutral approach above traditional dividing lines in the Finnish society. Demos has divided its organisation into a consultancy, Demos Helsinki, and a non-profit subsidiary concentrating on academic research, Demos Helsinki Research Institute.

### *Challenging the Status Quo or Upholding a Consensual Balance?*

Taking the position of a challenger in public discussion is not a favoured strategy of the interviewed party-affiliated think tanks. Traditionally, to give

controversial or provocative statements, an actor has had to have a very established position in society. EVA has created a strong position for itself and is able to challenge existing views by making bold statements. For the others, it seems rather difficult. Finnish think tanks generally do not choose to be competitive in the public arena but rather influence through their reports, events and background contacts with both journalists and politicians. In the interviews, establishing a credible, even respected, position seemed important. In the long term, being controversial was not considered a good strategy. Even if making radical statements would give a think tank media attention, this was not seen as a sustainable approach. Demos Helsinki emphasised that giving provocative statements is not a desirable thing to do when trying, at the same time, to join projects in the public sector. Some notable exceptions exist. The liberal think tanks EVA and Libera, backed up by private funding by companies, issue adversarial or contested statements in an effort to steer and push the public discussion to a certain direction. The role of economics in political decision-making is brought in heavily by EVA, which, in 2017, launched a new project with ETLA called The Economist Machine (Ekonomistikone), a Finnish economist panel that is an 'independent and academic expert panel' with the goal to 'increase the societal role of research in economics, and the usage of research results in decision making' (http://www.ekonomistikone.fi/tietoa-koneesta/). The partners in the project included VATT, PT and PTT. All professors and associate professors in economics, as well as other economists, were invited to join the panel. The model for this project was borrowed from IGM Economic Experts Panel in the US, a nationwide panel consisting of leading economists. In the spring of 2019, EVA has also published the Guide for the New Members of Parliament, with the aim of distributing it to every candidate in the parliamentary elections. The publication aspires to define what economic liberalism means in today's society.

As an example of adversarial tactic, Libera has recently filed a complaint with the EU Commission against the Finnish state, which it sees as breaking EU regulation in labour market issues (Kuikka 2018). There is also an indication that small, recently sprung-up think tanks take a different avenue; for instance, Hattu, a feminist think tank, uses unpolished language to question the unequal aspects of the current status quo in society and carries out projects to empower women and other underprivileged groups in society (http://hautomohattu.fi/).

All the interviewed think tanks seemed to agree that the best route is to base their activity on persistency and long-term influence. This was also seen as an advantage and privilege compared with political parties that need to make quick statements. As Abelson (2009) has stated, in the case of think tanks, visibility is not power, but practically influencing a process is. At least, the party-affiliated think tanks seem to go towards the direction of the

well-established research institutes in Finland (e.g., e2). Think tanks taking a more adversarial position and using a more unconventional strategy, such as Hattu or Libera, could be seen as a counterweight to this approach that pursues credibility by pacing and formality.

In general, it might be true that those think tanks aiming to influence specific policy processes might have a conservative appearance in the media. As Berry argued in 1977, they would be hesitant to push ideas that might stir controversy and sacrifice insider influence as a result. What came through across the board in the interviews was that if one aims to have credibility and influence in the background, being provocative in public is not a good idea. This strategy works for either an old and established player or a more radical newcomer with less resources and no direct access to the political machinery. Furthermore, if a think tank aims to be involved in public projects, it should not act in a manner that is too adversarial.

> … saying certain things in a provocative manner cannot be an end in itself if we, at the same time, aspire to be a part of some public research projects, for example. (A non-aligned think tank representative)

With this said, one must still raise the point that when an organisation represents strong interests in society, it has much more leverage also in public. In the current societal landscape, neoliberal ideas have become so hegemonic that the organisations representing them, here mostly EVA and Libera, which also have considerable private funding, are possibly in a position to use adversarial tactics without major negative consequences. Attesting to the established position of EVA, at least until recent years, is the following statement:

> Every time they [EVA] say something, they get huge publicity. Maybe other think tanks choose to influence more in the background. (A party-affiliated think tank representative)

However, EVA's appearances at least in Helsingin Sanomat have a downward trend (see Table 2), and it is possible some other think tanks and other organisations have taken up part of EVA's room in the public. In connection with credibility, many interviewees saw the importance of a trustworthy front figure. Having a front figure is not only about them giving a face to a think tank and its publications, but also 'cashing in' the credibility they have built up earlier. For privately funded or non-aligned think tanks, this seemed to be an even more crucial point, which makes sense because they do not have the legitimacy that established research institutes have gained or the think tanks affiliated with political parties have been given (although it makes them appear biased). In the interviews, Demos Helsinki stood out as an exception, as it claimed that it does not want to have any

individual leader in public. Whether this is the case in reality is uncertain, as the founders Roope Mokka and Aleksi Neuvonen seem to make most of the public appearances. Another topic raised in relation to image was the name. Both Kalevi Sorsa -säätiö and EVA saw their names as burdens, as they carry too many meanings from the past that might distract or confuse the public. Furthermore, the name change that e2 (e2 Tutkimus; *e2 Research*) made clearly shows the importance of the name for the brand of the think tank. Left Forum and Libera have names that are self-describing and do not hide their political position.

The growing importance of social media was highlighted in the interviews, but strategies related to this varied. This also suggests differences in the relationship with the consensual/adversarial axis. In some think tanks, such as Demos Helsinki and Libera, social media activity is already a significant tool in getting publicity and engaging in discussion; in others, it was still considered a challenge, in which the implementation of social media use to the routine was still mainly a work in progress. The function of social media as a platform in which one needs to react fast to contemporary issues seemed to be more problematic for the party-affiliated think tanks. It seemed to pose a contradiction to the logic these think tanks operate on – to have an impact in the long term by publishing reports and engaging with research. Furthermore, EVA highlighted itself in the interview as wanting to be an 'anti-thesis for impulsive ideas'.

## To Conclude

In the introduction to this theme issue, Kelstrup sees that think tanks in Nordic countries might have both consensual and adversarial roles. Referring to earlier research, he sees that think tanks, for their part, uphold certain path dependencies in the systems of coordinated market economies. As there is a long tradition of coordinating varied interests in these societies, think tanks are often expected to support the tradition of consensual policymaking (Katzenstein 1985; Hall & Soskice 2001; Campbell & Pedersen 2014; Thelen 2014). In the Finnish political culture, path dependency seems to have a strong grip. In light of the historical evidence of a neoliberal project using corporatist structures for its benefit, it is possible to conclude that corporatism has adapted to new circumstances like the more competitive and open economy, instead of being eliminated. However, in Finland, liberal think tanks have recently come out with statements encouraging the dismantling of corporatist structures, wishing to dissolve the old consensus. This is in line with the findings of Culpepper (2016) and Kinderman (2017). They have found that think tanks funded by employer organisations have opposed consensual policymaking, promoting neoliberal ideas at the cost of broader institutional interests. In the Finnish case, a shift might be occurring

in this respect if the old consensual and corporatist structures do not serve the neoliberal project any longer.

At the same time, there is still a strong tendency to actually cooperate across the board in the party-affiliated scene when seeing consensus from the angle of a consensual negotiation culture. This implies a more cultural, deeply embedded way of consensual and cooperative way of doing things. There are several examples of this; even the think tanks themselves are engaging in different cooperative efforts. The project Future Tank for Us All (Tulevaisuuspaja meille kaikille) was a collaboration between all the seven party-affiliated think tanks, which was a part of Finland's 100th anniversary celebration programme. The project resulted in three discussion events and the publication of Seven Views for Finland – Future Visions by Think Tanks (2017).

In light of the material studied, the major obstacles for think tanks to grow into prominent players in forming public policy might be the political culture and structures, conservative media discussion and limited resources. The political culture and structures refer to the fact that there is simply not much room for new actors in the political scene. This kind of evidence has been found in Denmark (see Kelstrup & Blach-Orsten in this volume). Christiansen et al.(2010) have concluded that interest organisations have such privileged positions in policymaking, and civil society and the public sector are seen as so strong and well organised (Campbell & Pedersen 2014) that these factors act as barriers to new players in the Danish setting. In Iceland, the easy access of major interest groups to policymakers makes it less of a priority to find new ways to influence (see Oskarsdottir, the article on Icelandic think tanks in this volume).

All in all, Finnish think tanks represent a mix of attitudes when it comes to upholding consensus or bringing in competitive elements to disrupt the status quo. Liberal, business-funded think tanks tend to question the traditional structures, and new, more radical entrepreneurs sometimes resort to bold public statements as a tactic. The field of party-affiliated think tanks still form the majority and are mostly conservative in their moves. As for the think tanks' significance in the long run, changing existing culture and structures might be slow, but still happening. A probable avenue to enhance their role in the Finnish society is sound research.

NOTES

1. The interviews (seven) were conducted in February and March 2016 by master's students as a part of their methodology course in Media and Communication at the University of Z's Department of Social Research. The interview questions, themes and the art of conducting elite interviews were discussed and developed in depth by the author with the students. All interviews were recorded and transcribed.
2. The categorization was developed in co-operation by the author and research assistant Thomas Södergård, who collected and categorized the material.

3. The www.hs.fi online archive (the largest Finnish daily) search and a Google search were performed with the search words 'ajatuspaja', 'ajatushautomo' and 'think tank Finland'. A report written for the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture was also utilised (Raivio et al. 2018).
4. e2 Research has been categorized as a research institution also by the Ministry for Education and Culture since January 2020.

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